United Nations E/CN.6/2019/NGO/52

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
19 November 2018

Original: English

**Commission on the Status of Women**
**Sixty-third session**
11–22 March 2019
**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century"**

## Statement submitted by The Athena Fund-Laptop Computer for each Teacher, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

18-19672 (E) 101218

Please recycle

## Statement

# Promoting the Status of Female Teachers and Encouraging Female Students to Study Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM)

Most of Israel's teachers (85 per cent) are women, a figure similar to that in many other countries. Teacher salary and status is relatively low. In addition, in Israel, about 35 per cent of high-tech employees are women. However, the majority of those women (64 per cent) are employed in non-technological jobs. Managers in the industry say that most of the requests they receive for various jobs are from men. In other words, the problem is not discrimination. There is actually a very high desire in the high-tech industry to accept women and there are no barriers. Israel's Ministry of Finance says that the small number of women in this field leads to a loss of innovation and creativity that talented women could have contributed.

Why does this happen? According to the Ministry of Finance, a major reason for the small number of women employed in the high-tech industry is that fewer women choose to study the relevant scientific subjects – especially computer science, mathematics, engineering and physics – in high school, and later in post-secondary education. For example, female students constitute only 37 per cent of high-level physics students in high school, and only 31per cent of those studying computer science. Therefore, the answer is to encourage girls from an early age to study subjects that are relevant to the high-tech industry.

The Athena Fund, established in 2006, supports and empowers teachers, and works to bolster their status. This includes Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics teachers, who have a lot of influence on their students' future. By benefiting both female and male students, the Athena Fund's programs promote academic achievement among Israel's young girls, which will hopefully lead to higher university studies in subjects relevant to the high-tech industry, and more gainful employment of women in the future.

Teachers – and especially women teachers – should spearhead the transformation of Israeli schools into 21st century facilities with modern learning processes and methodologies suitable to the new digital era. To do so, the Athena Fund closes the digital gap, and makes teachers digitally literate by providing them with the required advanced equipment and professional training.

In the new connected world, teachers need to become mentors and guides for their digitally-oriented students. Teachers should strive to ensure that relevant content reaches the student's personal world to help develop his or her personality, skills and abilities.

The Athena Fund established and operates five programs: Laptop for Every Teacher in Israel (launched in 2007), Laptop for Every Kindergarten Teacher (2012), Tablet for Every Science Teacher (2014), iPad for Every Special Education Teacher (2015) and Laptop for Every English Teacher (2018).

So far, the Athena Fund, together with its partners, has provided laptops, tablets and iPads to more than 19,000 teachers across Israel, in 1,531 schools and kindergartens in 132 local authorities (municipalities, local and regional councils). Each teacher also receives 120 hours of techno-pedagogical training from professional instructors, with support from the Ministry of Education.

Two professional surveys have been conducted regarding the success of the Athena Fund's Laptop Computer for Every Teacher in Israel program. These were headed by Israel's MOFET Institute, a national intercollegiate centre for the research

and development of curricula and programs in teacher education. The first survey took place six months after the launch of the Laptop Computer for Every Teacher in Israel program in 2007, and then three years after the launch in 2011, 300 participating teachers in southern Israel where surveyed.

The surveys revealed that 99 per cent of participating teachers reported an improvement in their status in the classroom. The number of weekly classes in which teachers used the computers as teaching tools increased sevenfold. Furthermore, the number of weekly classes in which students were given tasks requiring computer usage increased fourfold.

Also, according to the surveys, the laptops helped teachers improve their teaching methods and incorporate a variety of new approaches. In addition, the teachers said that using computers as part of the learning process helped improve student achievement and behaviour. The teachers used the computers and the knowledge they gained to prepare learning materials, utilize class time effectively, and to find information for teaching purposes. In addition, improved computer skills strengthened the teacher's status in both the classroom and among colleagues, friends and family.

Another survey was conducted in 2015 among 500 teachers in youth villages. Over 60 per cent of the teachers noted that the laptop allowed for substantial improvement in the teaching process, and greatly helped them remain up-to-date in knowledge related to their work. Teachers used the laptops to find information in their professional field, such as articles and exercises, and prepare lesson materials, such as presentations and demonstrations. The laptops also contributed to improving the teacher's status.

This year, the Athena Fund is focusing mainly on its iPad for Every Special Education Teacher. The iPad helps students with special needs improve both their learning experience as well as their quality of life, both inside and outside of the classroom. iPads can also help increase student motivation to learn, along with providing opportunities for expanding horizons. In addition, the iPad improves interpersonal communication with teachers, family and the environment, and enables students to cope better with their difficulties. Furthermore, the iPad enables the student to discover new aspects of the world, including high level thinking and comprehension skills.

The program is designed to empower special education teachers in Israel and enable them to communicate better with their students. In addition, it provides access to a wide variety of teaching materials which significantly changes the lives of students. Teachers can prepare special programs for their students using the iPad, and students can continue the learning experience at home after school.

Through this Athena Fund program, about 10,000 special education teachers in Israel will receive iPads, along with special software and applications for students with special needs and disabilities. The program is being implemented in cooperation with the Ministry of Education's Department of Special Education.